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ABSTRACT

Use of the mass media as a teaching instrument in the classroom has increased considerably at all grade levels in the past few years. The newspaper is the most widely used of the media, the direct result of a national campaign by publishers, known as "Newspapers in Education" (NIE). This initiative encourages the use of newspapers as an educational tool both to complement and to supplement traditional classroom texts and resource materials. There are a number of ways teachers can use newspapers to teach comprehension and critical thinking and to help students develop sensitivity and awareness of the self, the community, the nation, and the world. Some teachers have developed classroom materials using the newspaper for specialized instructional purposes, while others employ the newspaper as a foundation for law-related courses. Still others have devised a newspaper course for older students that helps prepare them for effective citizenship in an independent world, providing instruction in global concepts such as economic interdependence, the migrations of people, environmental independence, cultural diffusion, the communication revolution, and cultural diversity. Newspapers can also prove to be beneficial for teaching adult education students and learning disabled students. For readers at all levels, the newspaper can be a versatile tool to obtain useful and interesting information while developing an individual's ability to read. (MS)

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Using Newspapers as Effective Teaching Tools

by Nola Kortner Aiex

Use of the mass media as a teaching instrument in the classroom has increased considerably at all grade levels in the past few years. The *Journal of Reading* carries a regular series—"Use the News"—on integrating the reading of newspapers into classroom activities. The newspaper is the most widely used of the media, the direct result of a national campaign by publishers, known as "Newspapers in Education" (NIE). This initiative encourages the use of newspapers as an educational tool both to complement and supplement traditional classroom texts and resource materials (Newton, 1985). "The Newspaper as an Effective Teaching Tool" (1981) explains the intent of the program and provides a variety of classroom activities using newspapers.

At the present time, about 600 newspapers in the United States and Canada participate in the NIE program, which involves approximately three million students, 90,000 teachers, and 16,000 schools each year. Before the advent of NIE, newspapers tended to be used only by secondary school social studies teachers in two-week units or for Friday current events sessions. Now, however, newspapers are used throughout the school year in every area of the curriculum (Kossack, 1987).

The success of this broad initiative is evident in programs such as "Newspapers Are for Kids, Too!", which was designed for young children and their parents. It contains creative ideas to help children improve reading, writing, social studies, math, and science skills. It can easily be modified for classroom use in the elementary grades (Hermann, 1981).

Teaching comprehension, awareness, and skills

Rhoades and Rhoades (1985) provide ways teachers can use newspapers to teach comprehension and critical thinking and to help students develop sensitivity and awareness of the self, the community, the nation, and the world.

Hamrick (1981) designed a 60-page activity booklet that is organized by sections of the newspaper and can be adapted to most grade levels. It can be used to teach basic skills in a variety of subject areas, including language arts, reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. The activity sheets allow students to use the different newspaper sections to locate, categorize, and sequence details, and to distinguish fact from opinion. The activity sheet also helps the students to locate main ideas, to form sentences, to find facts, to practice critical thinking skills, to solve math problems, to write creatively, and to comprehend better.

Other teachers have developed classroom materials using the newspaper for more specialized instructional purposes. For example, Yeaton and Braeckel (1986) created a series of model lessons for grades 4-6 that demonstrate the use of the newspaper to study the *United States Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights*. First, the lessons contain step-by-step procedures and sample questions to show how each specific part of the newspaper can be used in a lesson. Then, sample lessons take children on a journey back to the historical time when the Constitution was written. Numerous interesting, practical activities are suggested within the lesson plans.

Teaching legal awareness and citizenship

Another specialized newspaper-based course was developed by Diamond and Riekes (1981) for students in grades 10-12. This course employs the newspaper as a foundation for law-related courses. Model lessons are delineated for each part of the newspaper, as well as in five law-related areas: criminal law, consumer law, family law, housing law, and individual rights law. A sample lesson in the Diamond and Riekes course deals with developing critical thinking skills by resolving problems described in newspaper columns—a "Dear Abby" column, in one case. After each student has read the column in question, the teacher divides the class into groups, and each group discusses the problem and determines some resolution following a decision-making procedure previously outlined in the class. After each group presents the reasons for its decision to the entire class, a general discussion is held on the problem and a variety of possible solutions are considered.

Another lesson revolves around the concept of juvenile law. Following a discussion of what juvenile law is and why there are separate laws for juveniles, the students read a letter to the editor dealing with a serious crime committed by a juvenile. The students decide whether they agree with the writer's position, debate the question of whether juveniles should be treated as adults in the court system, and make a chart showing the advantages and disadvantages of holding juveniles responsible for the crimes they commit.

Schwartz and Bromberg (1984) have devised a newspaper course for older students that helps prepare them for effective citizenship in an interdependent world, providing instruction in global concepts such as economic interdependence, the migrations of people, environmental independence, cultural diffusion, the communication revolution, and cultural diversity. The emphasis of the course is on reading, writing, and reasoning ability; and it requires students to classify and organize materials, to identify cause and effect, and to make judgments using sound reasoning.

Developing critical consumers

A course intended for intermediate and junior high school students (Greenup, 1983) presents 11 lessons using newspaper materials to teach consumer education. The practical classroom activities help students 1) define consumer education terms and distinguish between wants and needs; 2) explain why laws are necessary for consumer and seller protection and understand the concept of consumer responsibility; 3) define consumer-related terms; 4) create a classroom newsletter to reflect consumer knowledge; 5) recognize and explain different advertising ap-

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peals; and 6) explain the intent of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the work of the Federal Trade Commission.

A series of instructional ideas developed by Dianna (1983) also focus on teaching intermediate and junior high students to respond critically to advertising. An outline defines 16 advertising techniques (including eye appeal, youth appeal, snob appeal, celebrity endorsement, and expert endorsement); and a list of activities which help students realize the effects of advertising, create their own ads, and evaluate television and radio commercials as well as those in print.

Making reading real for adult learners and learning disabled students

Newspapers can also prove to be a valuable tool for teachers who work with adult education students. Fenholt (1985) provides a series of activities that use the newspaper as a learning resource to develop both reading and life skills. Her contention is that regular elementary school reading materials fail to motivate readers at the adult level and are also embarrassing for adults to use. Fenholt's activities booklet is aimed at adults who want to read on an intermediate level and pass the graduate equivalency diploma (GED) test.

The practical activities include those designed to promote an understanding of coupons, want ads, news stories, and maps and those designed to build vocabulary. One exercise called "Decode the Ads" deals with deciphering abbreviations commonly used in classified advertisements. A unit on news stories uses questioning techniques to elicit information on what happens in the story. An exercise that uses weather maps asks the student to begin by putting a mark on the general location in which he or she lives. It then asks the student to find newspaper stories about local, state, national, and international news.

Hunter and McNearney (1988) have designed a series of twelve lessons which use the newspaper in an adult basic education curriculum. Each lesson focuses on a particular letter of the alphabet and furnishes a list of vocabulary needed for the lesson, extensive hints on how to teach it, and suggested activities.

Chandler (1988) reports that individual newspapers have also developed their own programs for adult literacy. The *Tulsa World*, for example, has introduced a program called "Read Up," which combines use of the daily newspaper with a telephone hotline to provide tutoring help for adult illiterates. A group of prison inmates served as a test group for this program. The inmates were tested for reading ability before beginning the twelve-week program and again at its conclusion. Results indicated substantial gains in vocabulary, comprehension, and reading skills—one inmate advanced by two grade levels.

Among other groups that can benefit from using the newspaper in the classroom are learning disabled students. Like adult education students, they often "experience frustration and failure with traditional approaches to content area instruction." (Monda, *et al.*, 1988) Monda asserts that the newspaper can be helpful for the LD teacher who wants to create an individualized instructional program, since it appeals to students who are not easily motivated. She advocates using teaching strategies that target specific learning skills in reading or language arts, and even in mathematics.

Some of Monda's suggestions include: 1) using words in grocery ads, sports sections, or comics to teach alphabetizing; 2) using news stories to teach grammar; 3) having students make charts or collages of words dealing with the five senses; 4) asking students to select a picture or photograph and to write their own stories; 5) having students make a timeline for current events; 6) having students write their own classified ads; 7) discussing the key elements of a book or movie review; and 8) asking students to design their own newspaper to report events happening in class or in school.

This sampling of the ERIC database indicates that in the development of readers at all levels, the newspaper can be a versatile tool. Certainly its currency and its availability outside the classroom make it valid and "real" material to use in developing one's ability to read.

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